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THE LEARNING DISABILITIES TEACHER.

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In 1959 the New Jersey State Legislature enacted a law establishing the position of learning disabilities specialist (LDS) in order to provide services to aid the classroom teacher's work with pupils who have handicaps or learning disabilities. The innovation of new instructional methods, the adaptation of new educational materials, and the planning of new instructional experiences are among the chief objectives. The focus is on basic physiological, psychological, environmental, and academic causes for learning disability. The efforts of the LDS are also directed to the prevention of learning disabilities in those children who give early evidence of such development. The local school superintendent is responsible for the selection of the LDS; however, the state will reimburse the school for the cost of the specialist. The functions of the learning disabilities specialist can be summarized as follows: (1) educational diagnostician, (2) consultant to the classroom teacher and the school administration, (3) teacher for small groups of handicapped children or for the individual handicapped child, and (4) member of the team for continued child study. (WL)

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"THE LEARNING DISABILITIES TEACHER"

Session 7A Helping The Disabled Reader

In 1959 the State Legislature of New Jersey enacted a law designed to help local school districts provide a more meaningful and effective program of education for (1) children classified as emotionally and socially maladjusted; and (2) pupils whose behavior indicated that they would eventually fit into such a category unless they received immediate help.

To implement this legislation, the New Jersey Department of Education wrote, and the State Board of Education approved, rules and regulations which called for state financial reimbursement to local school districts that hired special services personnel who functioned in a specified manner. Such "special personnel" were to represent four areas: child psychiatry, psychology, social work, and remediation of

instruction. It was further expected that while representatives of these four fields would comprise the basic membership of a child study team in a school district and would be responsible for classification procedures, the total team would draw upon the particular contributions of many other school personnel. The principal, nurse, school physician, guidance counselor, the classroom teacher, and supplementary teachers such as the reading specialist and the speech correctionist would be involved in the identification of pupils who required a special educational program and in the development of the program itself.

Although the primary impetus behind the 1959 legislation was the need to provide for the already socially maladjusted or emotionally disturbed child, the interpretation of the law by the State Board of Education and the professional staff of the New Jersey Department of Education expressed deep concern for preventive measures and the concomitant necessity for early discovery of those children who exhibited symptoms of distress. There was a general agreement that in the school setting,such signs would most likely be manifested in learning disabilities defined as failure to meet educational demands or to make satisfactory educational progress.

The fact that "remediation of instruction" had been included as an integral part of the four special personnel areas called for both an upgrading of the traditional role assigned to the educator in terms of special education, and the defining of a broader concept of "remediation" than had hitherto held away so that it could be understood to embrace the whole child in his total curriculum rather than be limited to corrective lessons in one academic area and in isolation from the regular class and its teacher.

The classroom teacher is an integral part of the pupil's school environment. Discussion among the professional staff and referral to research studies in the area of remediation strongly underlined the need for services that would affect the climate of learning in the classroom through specialized in-service training and direct assistance provided on a continuing basis for this teacher. Not only was it felt that it was unrealistic to continue to think that taking children out of the classroom was the best or only answer, but such a solution used too frequently quite often created an equally difficult situation where it was not possible to return the pupil to the regular class and have him succeed, and where the classroom teacher began to feel less competent, less inclined, and less involved in the planning and execution of an appropriate instructional program for the handicapped pupil.

The staff of the New Jersey Office of Special Education working closely with its Advisory Council, other members of the staff of the Division of Curriculum and Instruction, the Deputy Commissioner, and the Commissioner of Education concluded that although supplementary instruction such as special remedial reading and speech correction was necessary and that local school districts through state financial reimbursement would be encouraged to make these available where needed, it was most important that services be provided which would affect the classroom teacher's work with pupils classified as handicapped and having learning disabilities. Such services would be directed toward meeting the needs of these children, toward investigating, innovating, and demonstrating methods of instruction which offered possible success, toward finding, devising, or adapting helpful educational materials, toward suggesting

and planning educational experiences. It was believed that remediation services such as these to help the classroom teacher feel more able to work with the handicapped, but which also affected him in terms of how he saw his role and the pupils in his class would be effective in the prevention of educational disabilities as well as in their correction.

Under the Rules and Regulations adopted by the New Jersey State Board of Education to implement the Beadleston Act of 1959 the title of "remedial instructor" was used to designate that member of the child study team whose function was concerned with remediation of instruction. This title was maintained in the Grossi Act of 1963. In approving the Rules and Regulations of Chapter 29, P. L. of 1966, however, the more appropriate title of Learning Disabilities Specialist was adopted and is currently used.

The role of the Learning Disability Specialist, originally developed in response to legislation which was permissive in nature and directed toward helping to provide an educational program for emotionally and socially maladjusted pupils was extended in July 1966 to implement legislation which made it mandatory that public school districts provide an appropriate educational program for all handicapped children who are able to profit from instruction.

The Learning Disabilities Specialist is concerned with children identified or classified as handicapped where learning disability is a significant attribute of their behavior. The focus is on basic physiological, psychological, environmental, and academic causes for the learning disability rather than on the subjects taught in the curriculum. Prevention of disability is considered important and the efforts of the LDS are directed toward those children who give early evidence of becoming seriously

handicapped unless preventive measures are taken rather than toward those children who would without special help achieve relatively normal success though they might not reach their full potential. Although the LDS is expected to and does work with the special teacher of the N. I. class, the blind, the deaf, the M. R., etc., it is probable that he will be called upon most frequently to work with the classroom teacher in those cases where the pupil has a vision or hearing problem not grave enough for him to be classified as "blind", or "deaf", mental ability low but not so low as to place him in a class for the mentally retarded; social or emotional problems not great enough to classify him as maladjusted in either or both of these areas; poor physical coordination but not severe enough so to warrant assigning him to a category of "physically limited", etc.

Responsibility for the selection of the Learning Disabilities Specialist has been placed with the local school superintendent who has been encouraged to choose a master teacher from his own staff for this position. If a study of the teacher's educational background indicated the need for further specialized training, a reasonable amount of time has been allowed for this requirement to be met. Finding the right individual to perform this function on the child study team was and continues to be considered the necessary first step.

Because the Learning Disabilities Specialist must be accepted by the classroom teacher if meaningful changes are to be effected, it is considered to be of utmost importance that the individual selected for the position have, through experience in the classroom, given evidence of having earned the respect of other teachers, special services personnel and the school

administration with whom he has worked.

Today, the Learning Disabilities Specialist functions (1) as an educational diagnostician, who, in conjunction with other special education personnel, especially the psychologist, determines the nature and causes of the child's learning disabilities; (2) as a consultant to the classroom teacher and the school administration regarding the use of specific teaching methods and materials used with handicapped pupils; (3) as a teacher with an individual handicapped child or with small groups of these children for an indefinite period of time and in conjunction with the child's classroom teachers planned curriculum; and (4) as a member of the child study team which is responsible for the identification program, the classification examination and for recommendation to administration of the educational placement of pupils studied.

As of January 1968, 337 Learning Disabilities Specialists serve in the public schools of New Jersey.

To be fully approved as a Learning Disabilities Specialist, a teacher must give evidences of having completed the following requirements:

A. (1) Three years of successful classroom teaching.

(2) A Bachelors Degree from an accredited college.

(3) Ninety clock hours of supervised clinical practicum.

(4) Permanent New Jersey teachers certification.

(5) A program of graduate college studies with a minimum of twenty-four semester hours credit in the following areas or their equivalent. Work in the double starred areas is required.

Education of the Handicapped**

Learning Theory**

Physiological Bases of Learning**

Orientation in Psychological Testing**

Remediation in Basic Skills**

Diagnosis of Learning Disabilities**

Correction of Learning Disabilities**

Group Dynamics

Methods and Materials for Teaching the Emotionally and Socially Maladjusted

Curriculum Development in the Teaching of the Handicapped

Child Growth and Development

Teaching of the Culturally Handicapped

Teaching of Reading

Interviewing and Counseling

Educational Psychology

Community Resources

I. <u>The Education of the Handicapped**</u>

A. History of the development of educational services for children in each area of exceptionality.

B. Study of present services and research dealing with the characteristics of children who deviate from the norm intellectually, physically, socially and emotionally.

C. Evaluation of current practices in the education of the handicapped.

D. Study of the relationship of educational practices and their environmental settings.

II. Learning Theory**

A. Study of what motivation is and its effect on learning.

B. Study of leading theories of learning.

C. Study of rewards and incentives.

D. Study of interests.

E. Study of a climate for learning.

III. Physiological Bases of Learning**

A. Study of the neurological development and physical readiness of the normal child for learning.

B. Study of abnormal conditions of health which contribute to learning disability.

C. Study of metabolic and infectious disorders which affect learning.

IV. Orientation in Psychological Testing**

A. Overview the tests applicable to educational psychology. Study the interpretation of psychological reports as they apply to tests administered. Study the appropriate use of tests and the frequent abuse of test results. Study of test construction theory.

V. Remediation in Basic Skills**

A. Specific corrective methods and materials as related to specific diagnostic findings used in the teaching of reading, arithmetic, social studies and work study skills.

B. Observation of actual teaching of children who are emotionally disturbed or socially maladjusted.

VI. Diagnosis of Learning Disabilities**

A. Study of the nature and causes of learning disabilities as they involve visual perception, auditory perception, levels of abstract thinking, intellectual functioning, cultural and medical findings.

B. Study of the methods and materials used in the discovery and assessment of learning disability.

C. Study of the methods in arriving at a diagnosis based on evidence available.

D. Study of ways of reporting diagnostic findings.

VII. Correction of Learning Disabilities**

A. Study of methods and materials used to correct specific learning disabilities based on specific diagnostic findings.

B. Study of methods and materials to be used to compensate for irreversible learning disabilities.

C. Study of the use of time, organization and scheduling as corrective devices.